

ADDRESS: 135 S 18TH ST

Proposal: Install illuminated signage

Review Requested: Final Approval

Owner: 135 South 18th Street Associates, L.P.

Applicant: Stephan Potts, stanev potts architects

History: 1913; McIlvaine & Roberts, architects

Individual Designation: None

District Designation: Rittenhouse-Fitler Historic District, Contributing, 2/8/1995

Staff Contact: Heather Hendrickson, heather.hendrickson@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This application proposes to install three illuminated signs at the roofline of 135 S. 18th Street, a high rise building at the northeast corner of Rittenhouse Square. Originally designed as an apartment building by McIlvain & Roberts in 1913, it is currently home to AKA Rittenhouse Square, a luxury boutique hotel specializing in extended stays. This application proposes to install face-lit acrylic letters spelling “hotel aka” on the east, west, and north façades of the property, just below the roofline. The letters would be mounted directly onto the wall within existing grout lines.

The applicant initially submitted this proposal as part of a larger package which also included street-level signage at the second-floor belt course. The Historical Commission’s staff has already approved the street-level signage. The upper signage is outside the staff’s authority to approve in light of the Historical Commission’s 2018 denial of rooftop signage at this address.

The Architectural Committee and Historical Commission reviewed an application for signage at this address in the fall of 2018. At that time, signage was proposed for the rooftop that extended more than 15 feet above the parapet, and for street-level signage at the 3rd story corner. The Historical Commission denied that proposal.

In the spring of 2020, the Historical Commission reviewed and approved an application for street-level signage at the third-story corner that differed from the 2018 proposal. The signage was never installed.

This application proposes to install three illuminated signs at the roofline of 135 S. 18th Street that are different in scale and placement from the rooftop signage denied by the Historical Commission in 2018.

SCOPE OF WORK:

- Install illuminated signage on three facades near the roofline

STANDARDS FOR REVIEW:

The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines include:

- *Standard 9: New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.*
 - The signage would not destroy historic materials and would be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features of the property and its environment.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Approval, pursuant to Standard 9.

PHILADELPHIA HISTORIC COMMISSION

HOTEL AKA | **stanev potts architects**

135 South 18th St
Philadelphia, PA | April 9, 2024

Table of Contents	1
Cover Letter	2
<u>Proposed :</u>	
Existing Street Conditions	3
Building Signage Site Plan	4
Proposed Roofline Building Signage	5
Building Signage - Renderings at West & South Roofline	6
Building Signage - Renderings at East Roofline	7
<u>Included for reference :</u>	
PHC Approved South Elevation & Details - Street Level	8
PHC Approved East Elevation - Street Level	9
Building Signage - Renderings at Street level	10
Existing Hotel Precedences	11
Historic Hotel Precedences	12

Philadelphia Art Commission
1515 Arch St., 13th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

April 09, 2024

To the Philadelphia Historic Commission:

The following pages detail proposed building identification signage for the Hotel AKA at Rittenhouse Square, located at 135 S 18th Street. This application is for signage at the top of the building, in compliance with the Philadelphia zoning code, section 14-904 (3) 'Building Identification Signs', that would identify the single-tenant ownership of the high-rise as being a branded high-end hotel. These would be static illuminated wall signs. One would face east, one north and the other west. The overall objective of this signage is to bring a stronger presence of identity to the building and to help with way-finding. While the current proposal before you for signage along the roof line is designed to meet the by-right elements for building identification signage laid out in 14-904 (3), and meeting all other parameters of the signage section of the zoning code, we want to note that the PHC-approved street level signage (included in this package for reference only) will require a zoning variance for height, due to being above the second floor window sill and well below 150'. We believe it to meet all other aspects of the zoning code.

BACKGROUND

Originally designed as an apartment building by architects McIlvain & Roberts in 1913, the building currently houses boutique hotel suites and amenities on the upper floors, with retail tenants on Walnut Street, and a hotel bar & restaurant flanking the hotel lobby along 18th Street. Korman Communities purchased the building in 2006, when it underwent a conversion from multifamily to long-term stay. At that time, extensive exterior improvements were undertaken with PHC input to bring the street frontage condition and detail back to the original intended design. Working closely with the PHC, windows were replaced with historically accurate wood double hung windows throughout all floors, the masonry was carefully restored, and custom bronze window frame details were painstakingly recreated; recast in bronze and patinated to match the original metal work. In 2016, the building was converted to a hotel through extensive improvements of life safety systems. The building is now fully sprinklered and is an approved R1 building which has been a further investment in the quality, safety and longevity of this centenarian structure. In 2019 we worked with the Art Commission and the PHC to design and implement a canopy and new entrance doors on 18th Street.

NEW SIGNAGE

The street level signage, already approved and included here for reference, is intended for pedestrian level visibility within a block or less of the corner of the building. The installation location was selected due to it being best for pedestrian-level building identity signage for historic preservation purposes - despite its being higher than the by-right minimum of the zoning code, it is a clean section of stonework, with no ornament or crenelations. The by-right zone of potential signage is either taken up entirely by ornamental bronze detailing and rusticated offset stonework, neither of which are ideal locations for new building signage.

The proposed building identification signage we are asking for your review and approval of, just under the roof line, serves a different scale, and related but different purposes to that at street level. While much smaller overall than similar hotel brand and name lettering on nearby examples, the name of the hotel toward the top of the building serves the important purpose of allowing identification of the building by foot or car as one approaches by car looking west, coming from Broad Street, or when looking for the building from further up Walnut Street, looking back to the east, and from street intersections and foot traffic to the north on 18th St. Clientele have often expressed frustration trying to find the hotel upon first arriving. It also serves the more abstract purpose, framed by the by-right zoning status for building identification signage at the upper portions of building, of presenting the brand and identity of the building on the broader urban scale. As can be seen in the renderings, the intention is for this identification signage to be compatible with the aka brand itself - striving for elegance, but not over-stated or gaudy. Reinforcing this, the logo design is all lower case, and is to be lit only brightly enough to be reasonably visible but not overly so - something one can see when one looks for it, but that is not so bright it catches one's attention aggressively. It is in the same spirit of moderation that we are not proposing building identity signage on the south facade, where it would be directly across from the neighboring building across Walnut, but instead only where the building faces gaps in the adjacent skyline: across two-to-three story half block of low retail to the east and north, and the roughly 100' to the next tall building to the west, past and well over the head of the lovely Van Rensselaer Mansion currently hosting 'Anthropologie.'

The proposed roof line signage will be face illuminated, black metal channel letters. Color temperature to be roughly 3000 Kelvin (or warmer), and illumination level will be set to be at or below the average brightness of similar signs in a several block radius. We also propose to have dimmers installed on all proposed signage to be able to adjust the light levels if necessary, and a programmable timer, in order to be able to control the hours of illumination. All connection points will be at existing mortar joints.

At this time, we are seeking final approval of the proposed pair of building identification signs just below the roof line, with staff to approve final color temp and brightness. We hope you will agree this will be a welcome improvement to the building, one that will be in keeping with similar signage installed on hotels and other buildings from the same time period throughout Center City Philadelphia. We look forward to your feedback and collaboration on moving this forward!

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal,



Stephan Potts, AIA
Stanev Potts Architects



18th street and Walnut street, looking north, February 2020



18th street, looking north, February 2020



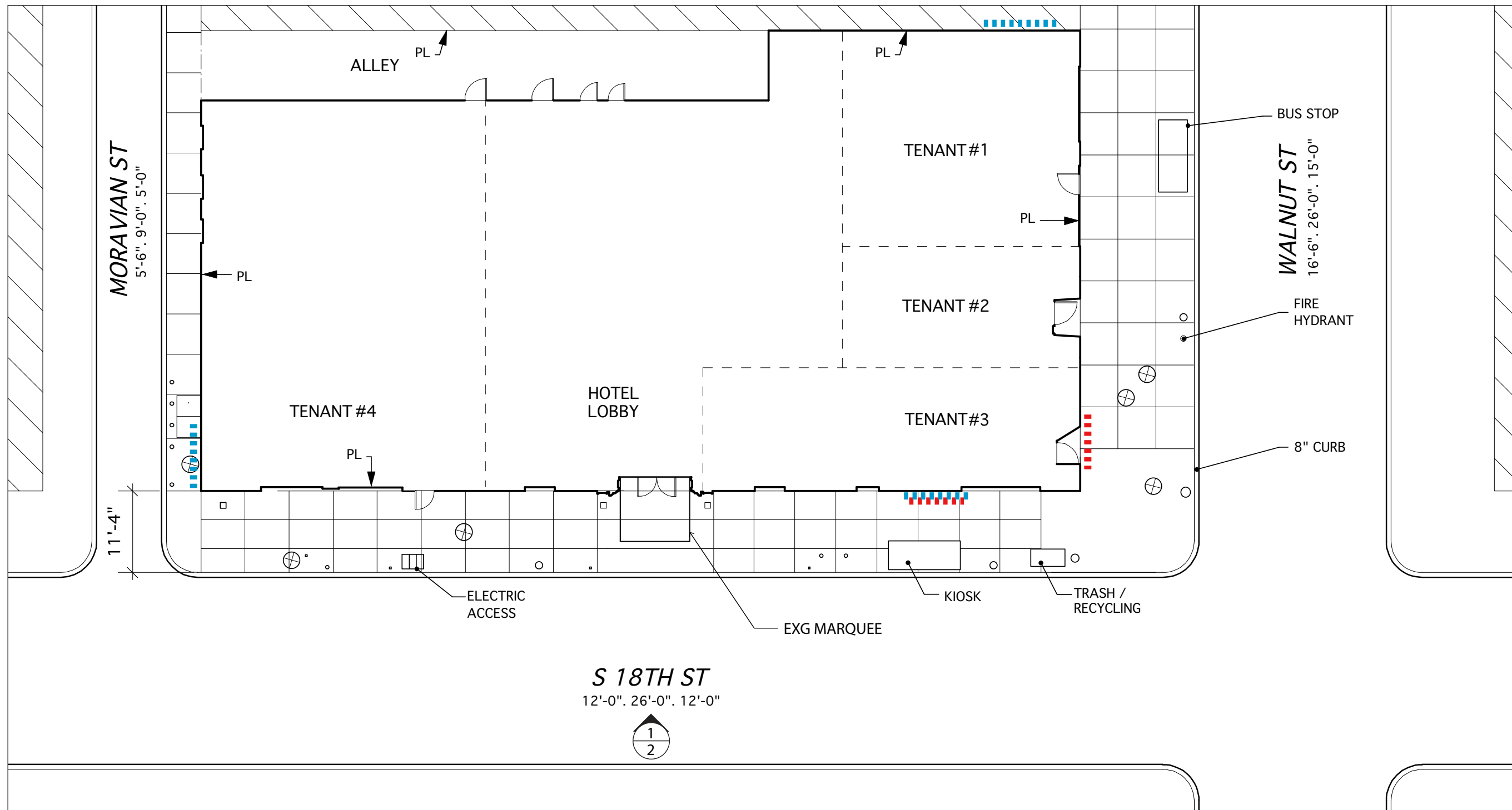
Existing 18th st entry, looking south, February 2020



Looking northeast, February 2020



Looking northeast, February 2020



KEY

- ⊗ EXISTING MANHOLE
- EXISTING PARKING SIGN
- EXISTING LAMP POST
- EXISTING FLUSH LIGHT
- EXISTING TRAFFIC LIGHT POLE
- PROPOSED AKA SIGNAGE AT SECOND STORY (PHC APPROVED)
- PROPOSED AKA SIGNAGE AT PARAPET LEVEL (CURRENT PROPOSAL)

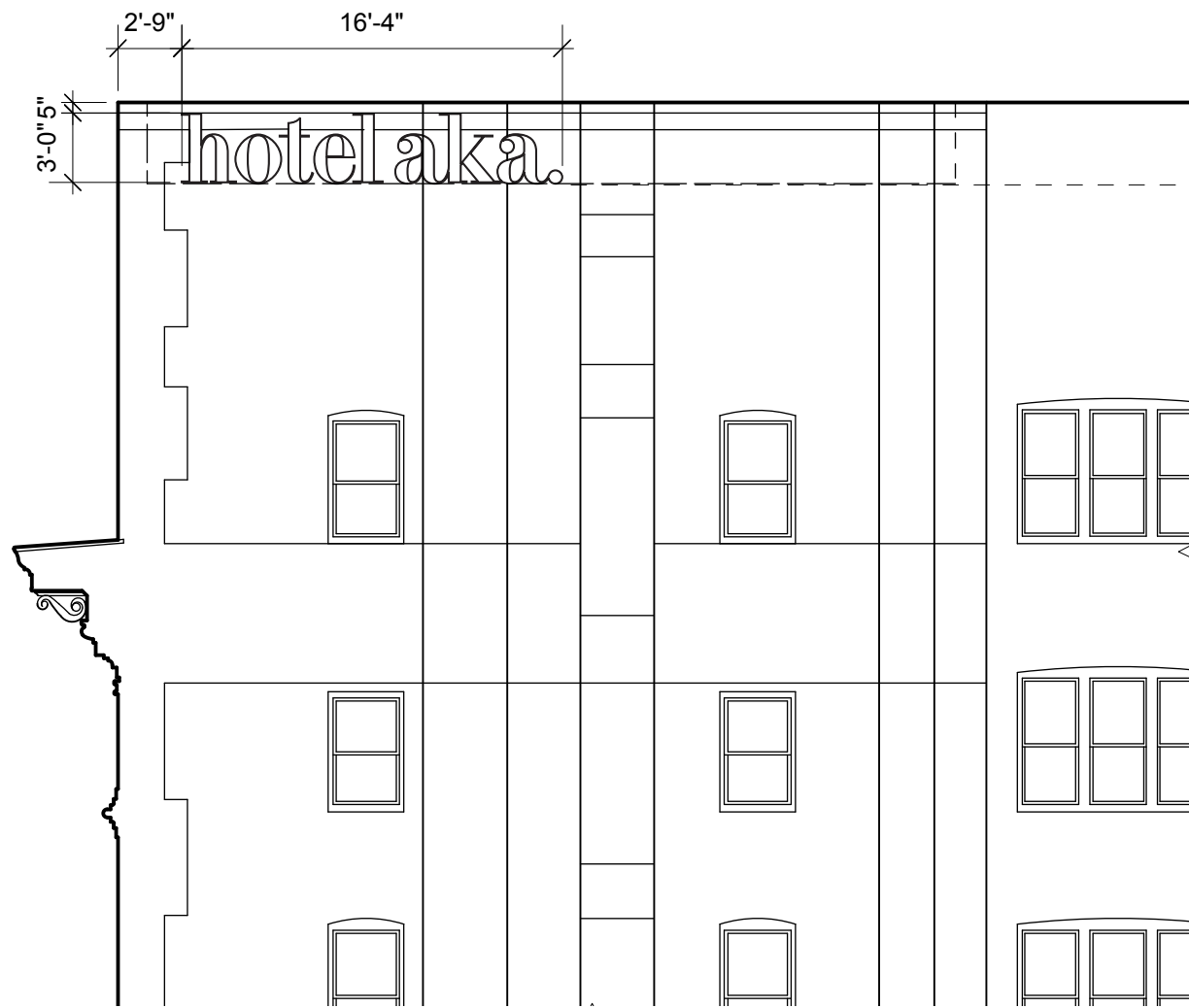
ROOFLINE SIGNAGE SHALL START AT OR ABOVE 150'
AND NOT EXTEND ABOVE TOP OF PARAPET

LIGHTING TO COMPLY WITH APPLICABLE CODES:
SHALL NOT EXCEED MAX ALLOWABLE BRIGHTNESS
NO ANIMATION, NO FLASHING

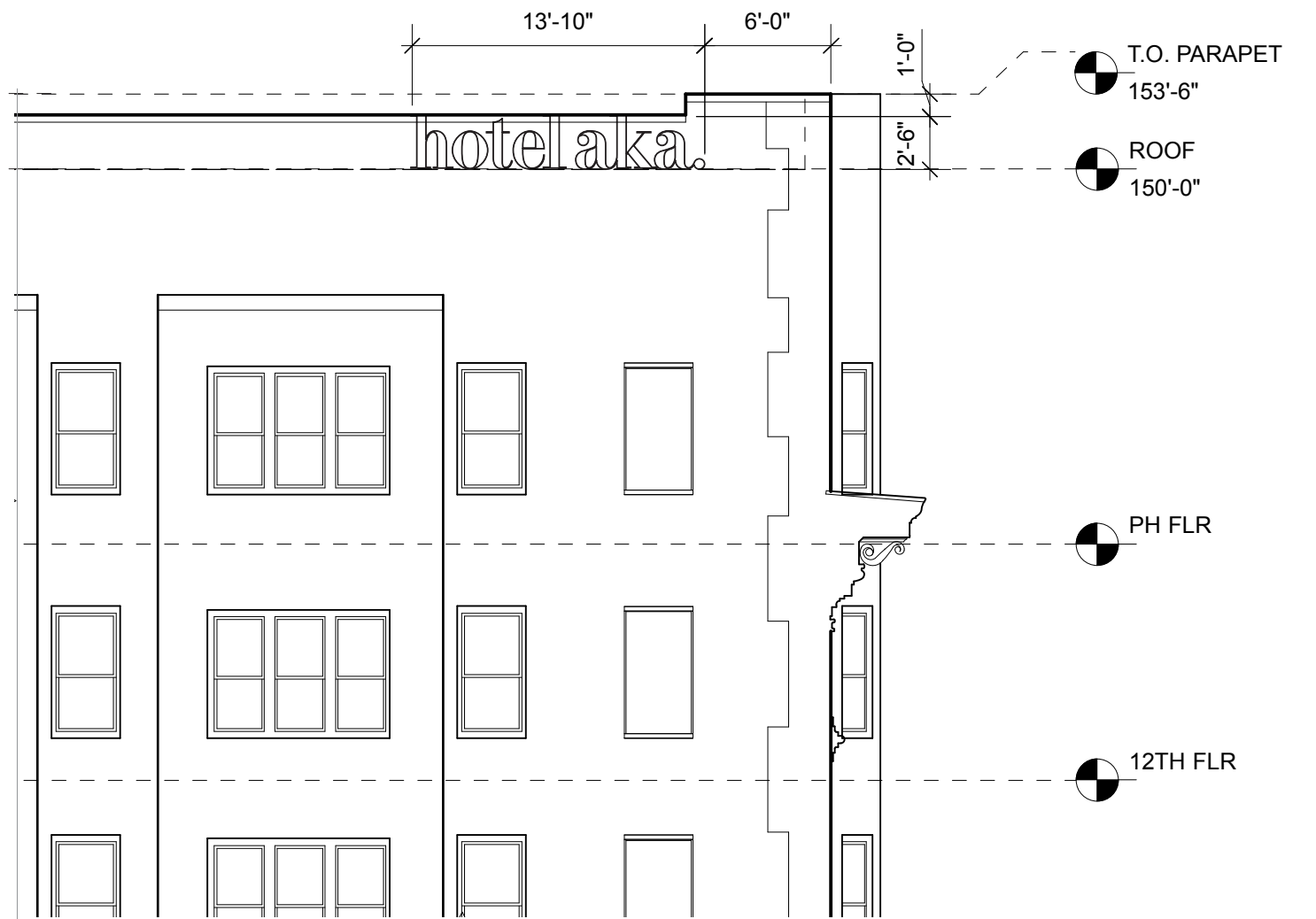
ROOFLINE SIGNAGE FABRICATION SPECS:

FACE LIT ACRYLIC LETTERS MATCH COLOR TEMP OF
CORNICE LIGHTING (SOFT WHITE +/-3000K)

BLACK METAL HOUSING 4" DEEP MAX W/
MOUNTING POINTS AT GROUT LINES ONLY

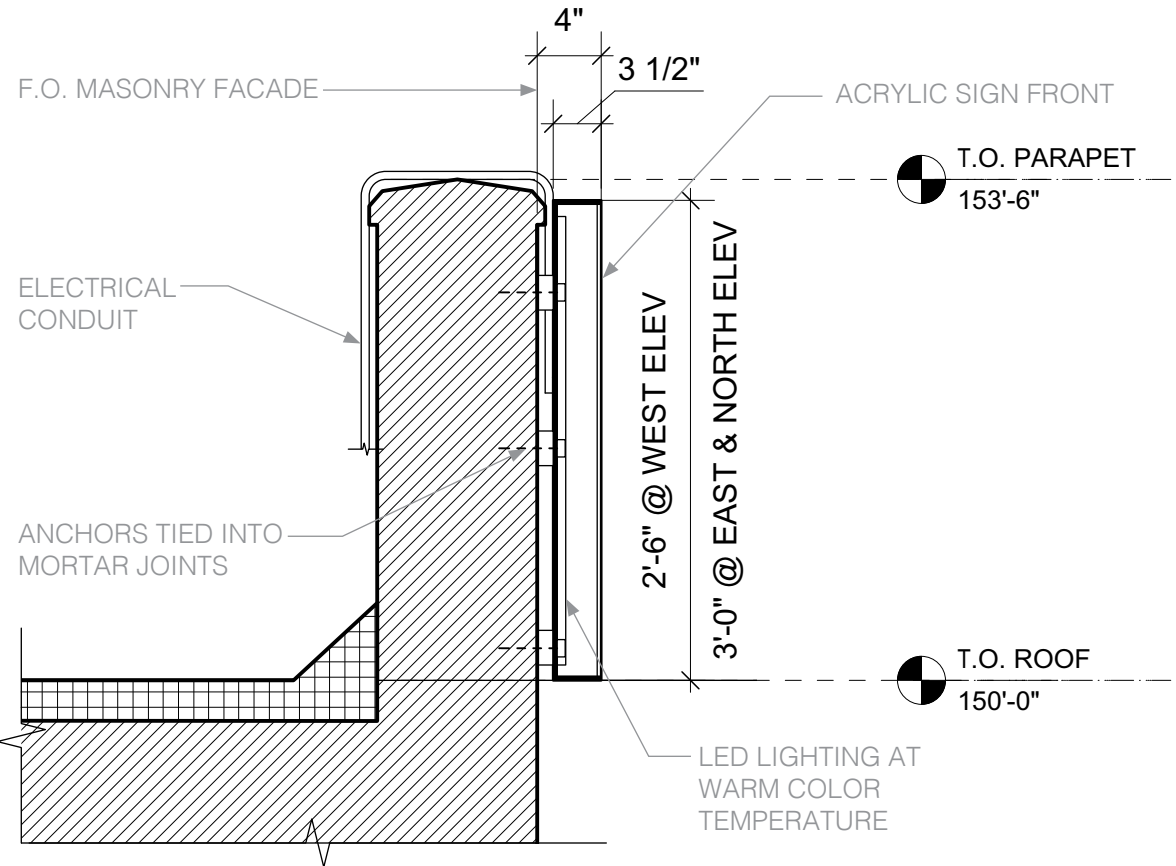


1. PARTIAL EAST ELEVATION



2. PARTIAL NORTH ELEVATION

SEE PAGE 5 FOR SIGNAGE FABRICATION SPECS



1. PARTIAL WEST ELEVATION

2. PARAPET SIGNAGE DETAIL



Rittenhouse Square View



Close Up View



Westbound Walnut Street View



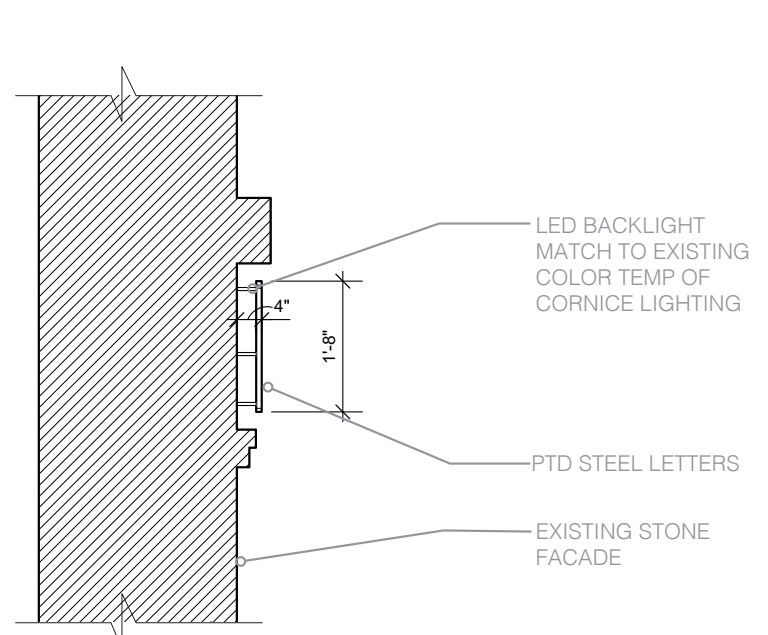
Close Up View



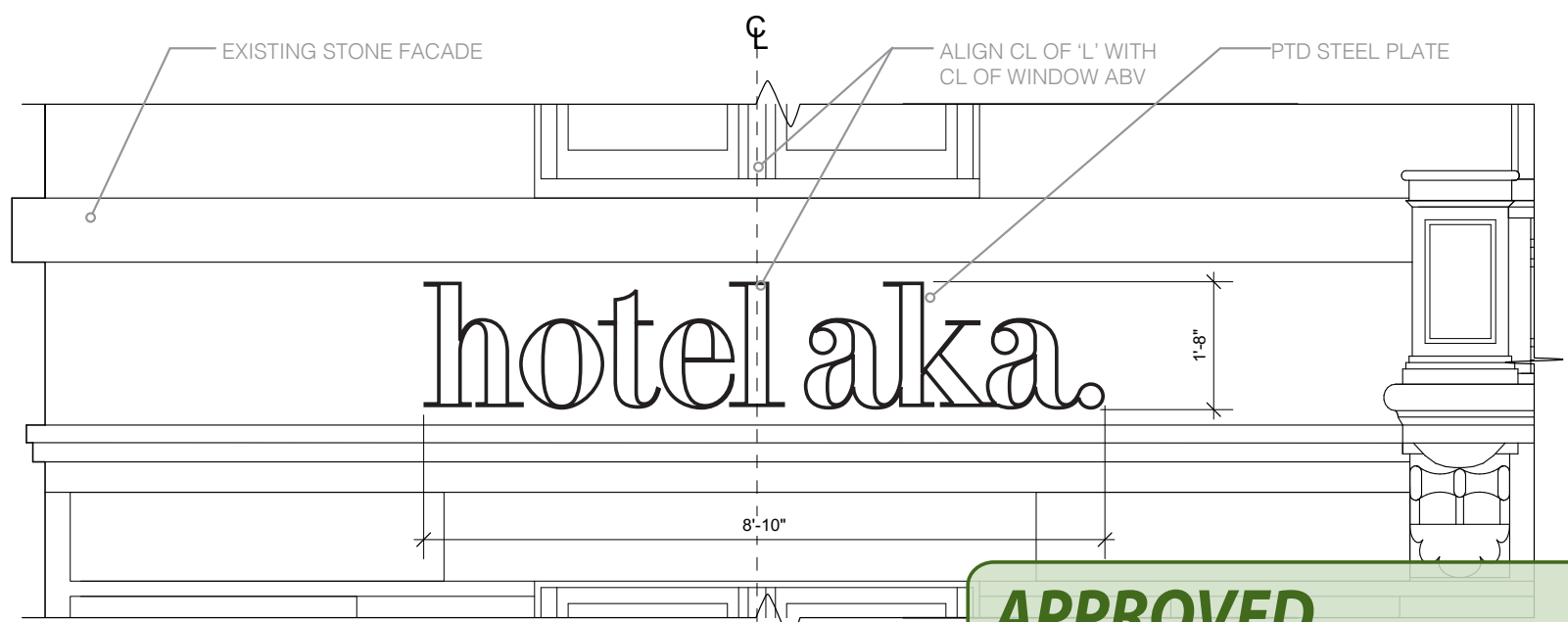
18th Street View Looking South



Close Up View



Note:
ALL CONNECTIONS TO BE AT EXISTING GROUT JOINTS IN MASONRY



APPROVED
By Heather Hendrickson, Philadelphia Historical Commission at 1:00 pm, Mar 22, 2024



ALIGN CL OF
LETTER 'L' W/ CL
OF WINDOW

SEE DTL 1/5 & 2/5

UPDATE 'aka'
LETTERING WITH 'abar'
SAME FONT, AREA,
LOCATION

APPROVED
135 SOUTH STREET
By Heather Hendrickson, Philadelphia Historical Commission at 1:00 pm, Mar 22, 2024



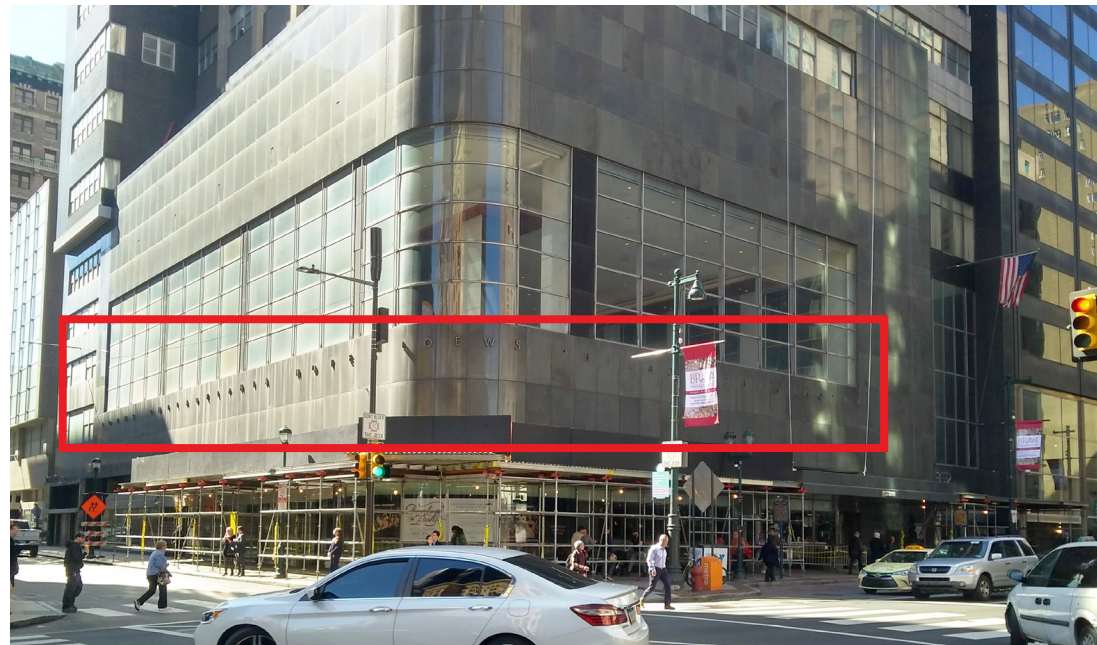
Rittenhouse Square View



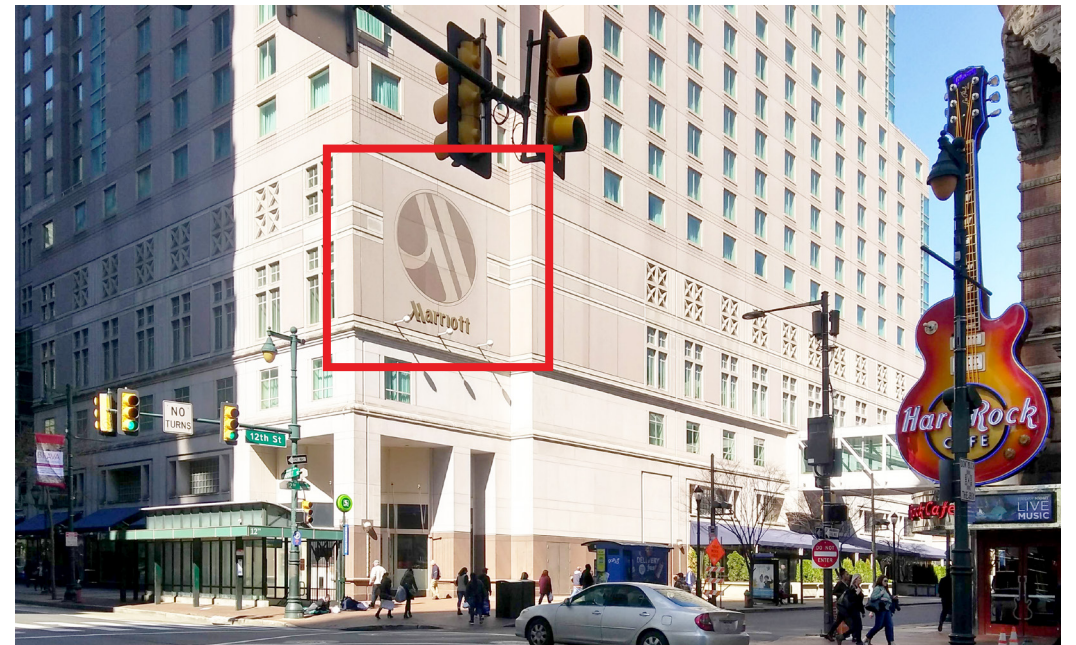
APPROVED
By Heather Hendrickson, Philadelphia Historical Commission at 12:59 pm, Mar 22, 2024



Sofitel Hotel - 17th and Sansom Street (Foreground)
W Hotel - 15th and Chestnut Street (Background)



Lowes Hotel - 12th and Market Street



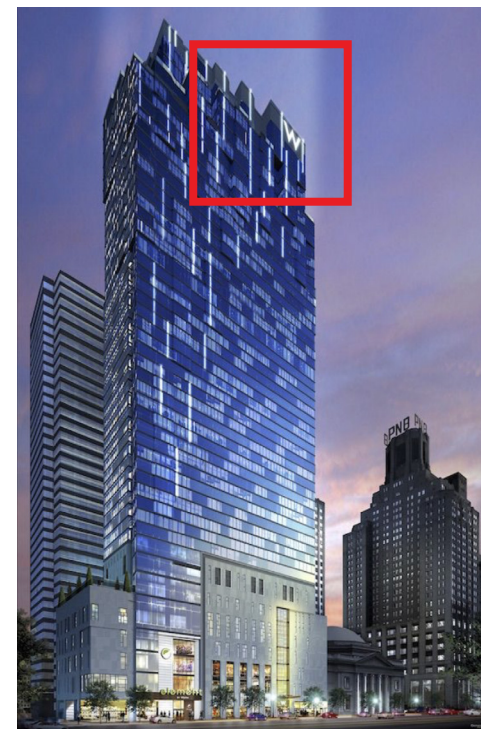
Marriott Hotel - 12th and Market Street



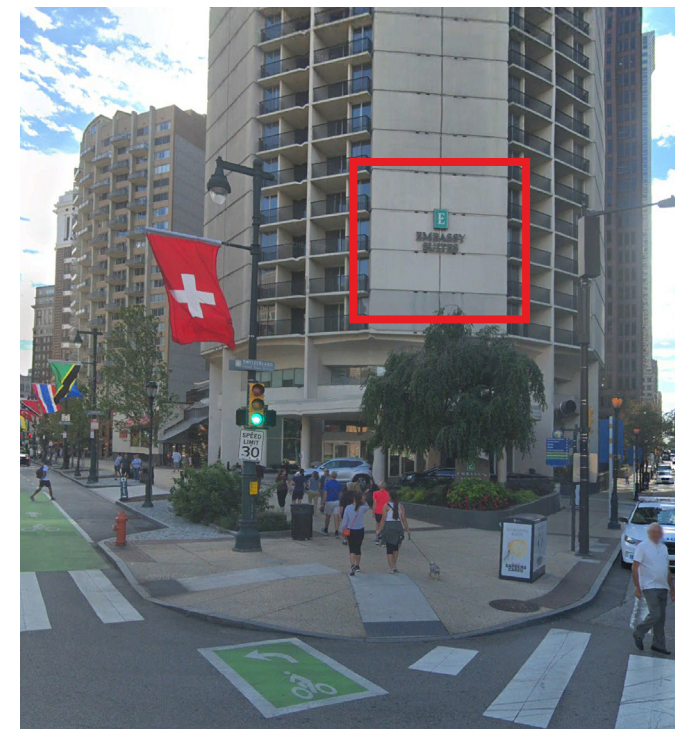
Marriott Hotel - 12th and Filbert Street



The Notary Hotel - 13th and Filbert Street



W Hotel - 15th and Chestnut Street



Embassy Suites - 18th and Benjamin Franklin Parkway



Aldine Hotel - 19th and Chestnut Street - 1890s - 1920s



Hotel - 17th and Walnut Street - Photo Date: 1928



Aldine Hotel - Photo Date: 1920s



Hotel - 1200 Block of Locust Street - Photo Date: 1960



Hotel - Between 1200 Block of Walnut Street - Photo Date: 1931



Hotel - 1200 Block of Sansom Street - Photo Date: 1959

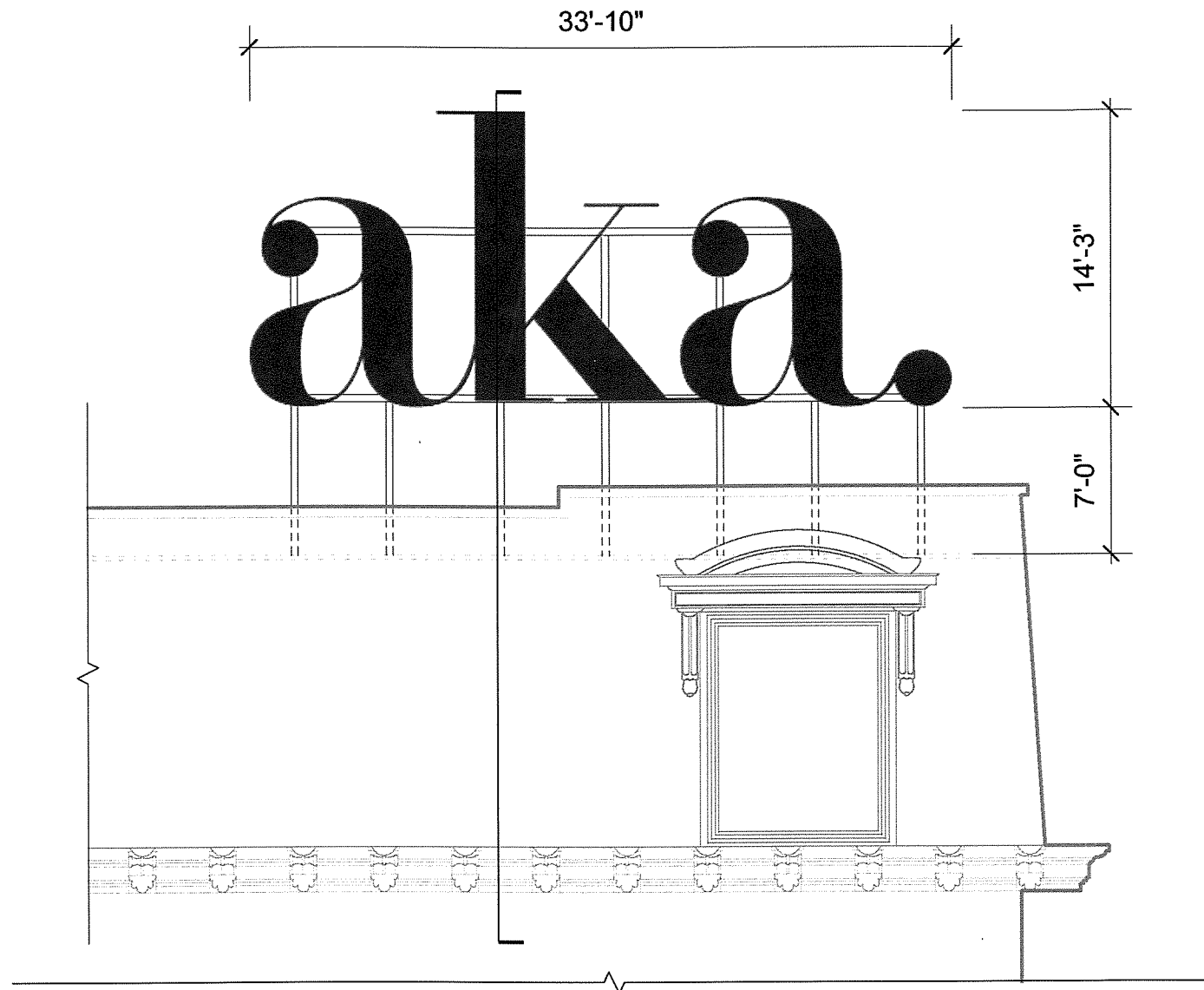


Hotel York - 1215 Walnut Street - Photo Date: 1921

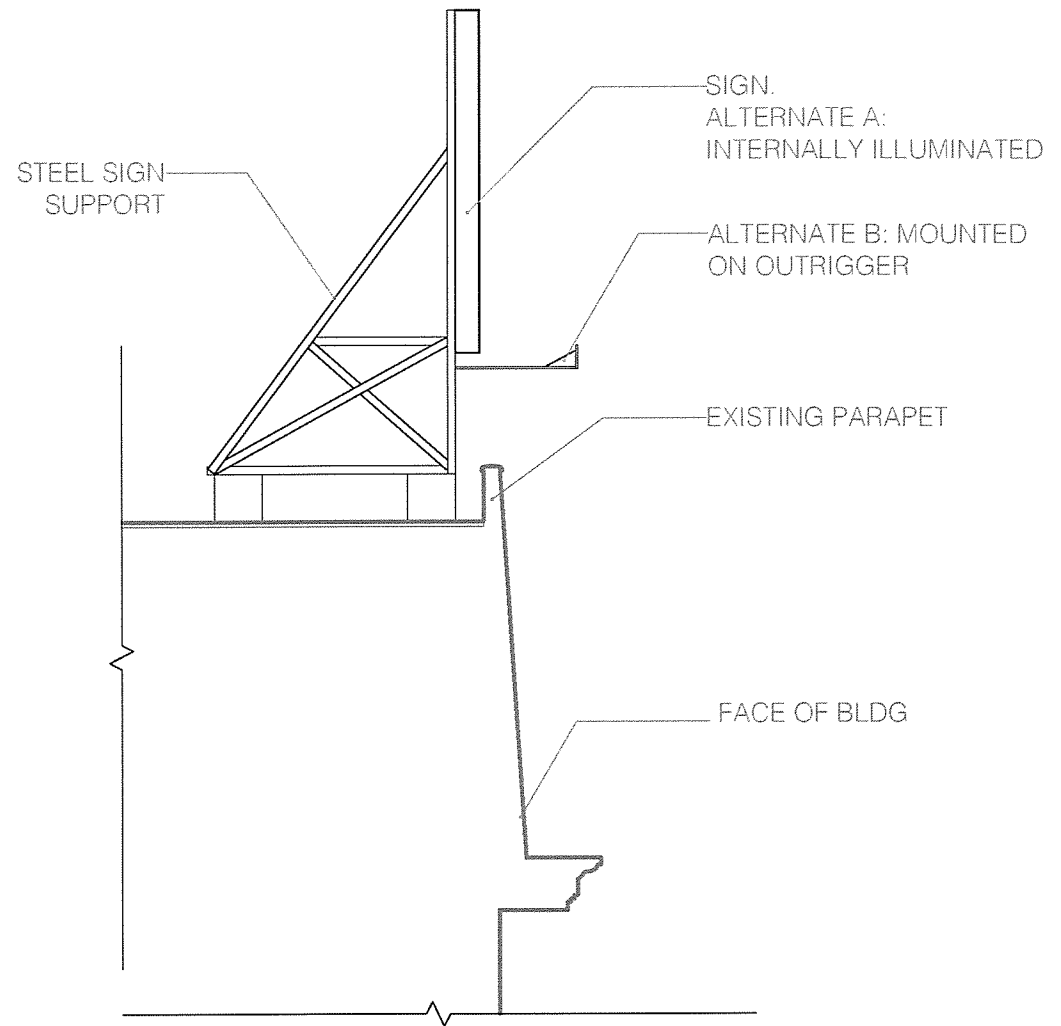
135 South 18th Street

2018 Application for rooftop signage

**– denied by the Architectural Committee and Historical
Commission**



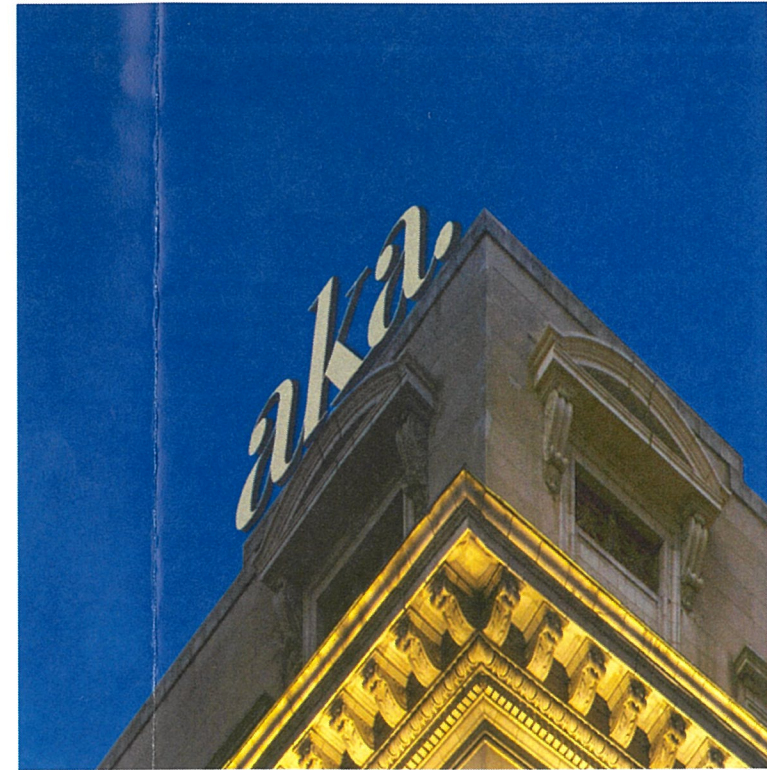
Roof Sign Elevation



Roof Sign Section



Rittenhouse Square View



Roof Top Sign

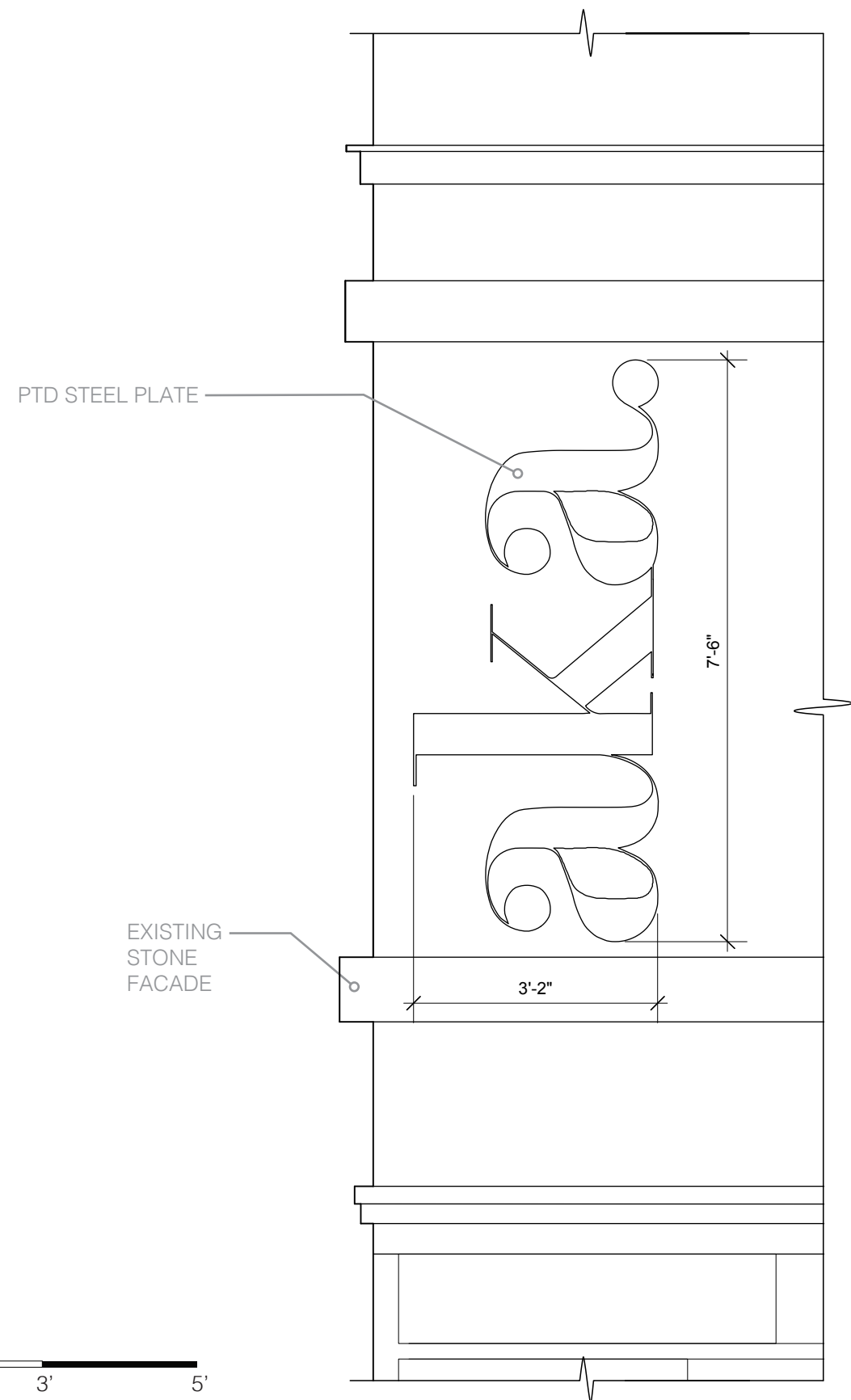


3rd Floor Corner Sign

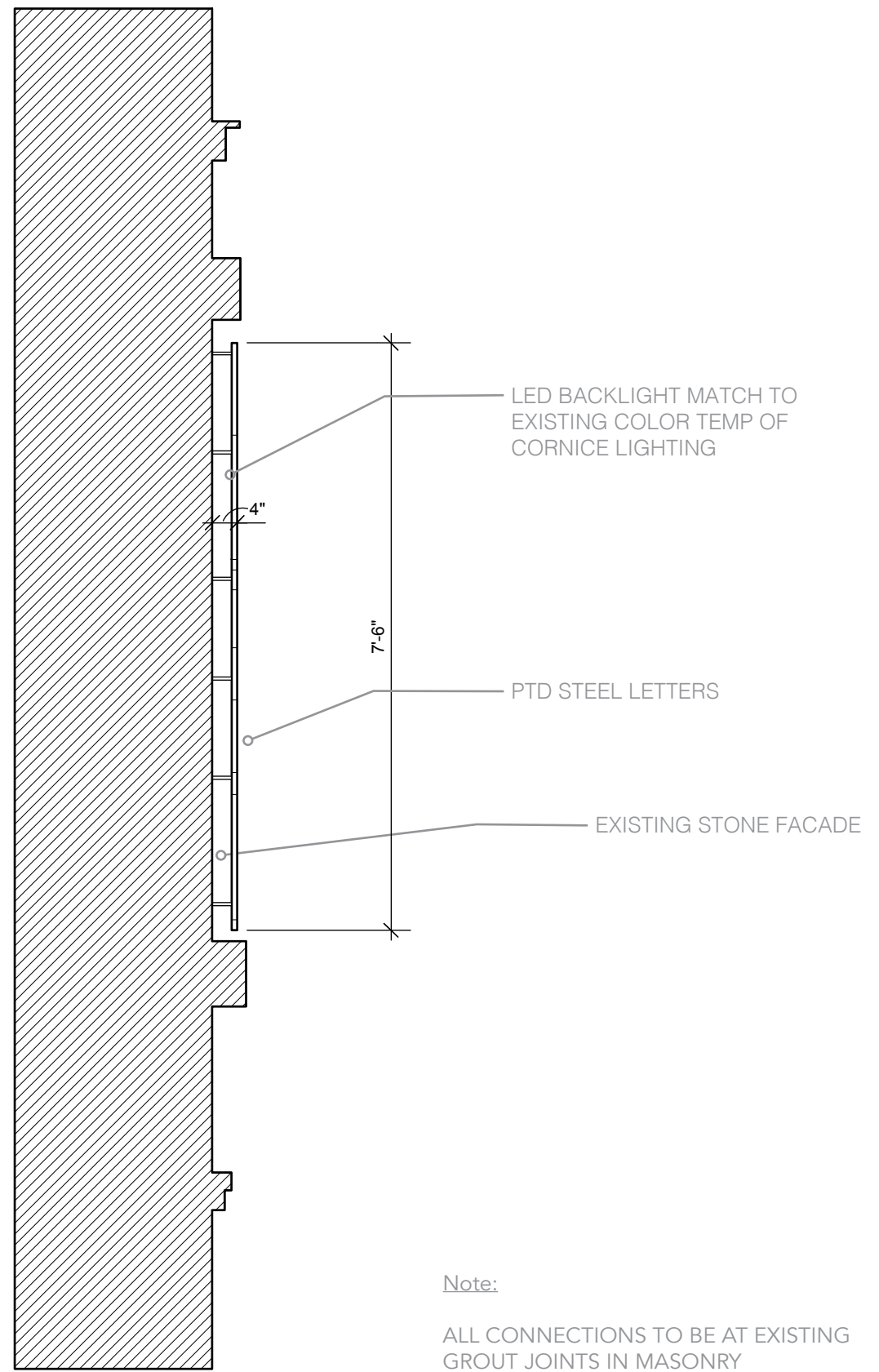
135 South 18th Street

2020 Application for street-level signage

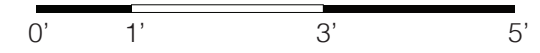
**– approved by the Architectural Committee and
Historical Commission**



1. SIGNAGE ELEVATION



2. SIGNAGE SECTION



Note:
 ALL CONNECTIONS TO BE AT EXISTING
 GROUT JOINTS IN MASONRY



Rittenhouse Square View



Daytime View



Close Up View